

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO CINCEUR
CINCUSNAVEUR
COMSIXTHFLT

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EXDIS MILITARY ADDRESSES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

FOLLOWING REPEAT ALGIERS 3793 ACTION SECSTATE INFO
LONDON MADRID NOUAKCHOTT PARIS RABAT 30 DECEMBER 75.

QUOTE

SECRET ALGIERS 3793

EXDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS CINCEUR, CINCUSNAVEUR AND COMSIXTHFLT

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, MOPS, AG, MO
SUBJECT: SAHARAN OUTLOOK

1. SUMMARY. ALGERIANS' INTENTIONS IN THE SAHARA REMAIN VERY MUCH IN QUESTION. THEIR CAPABILITIES THERE ARE LIMITED, BUT THEY ARE CONTINUING MILITARY STRENGTHENING AND A SOMEWHAT LOW-KEY POLITICAL MOBILIZATION. WHILE LIKELIHOOD OF THEIR TAKING DIRECT ACTION AGAINST THE MOROCCANS MAY HAVE INCREASED, THERE IS NOTHING INEXORABLE ABOUT THEIR DOING SO. END SUMMARY.

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2. SINCE MY RETURN FROM CONSULTATION DECEMBER 13 I HAVE

TALKED AT LENGTH TO WIDE RANGE OF DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES, A FEW ALGERIAN OFFICIALS, AND MY OWN STAFF ABOUT ALGERIAN INTENTIONS IN THE SAHARA. CERTITUDE I HAD ON LEAVING THIS POST NOV. 19 THAT ALGERIANS WOULD NOT INITIATE HOSTILITIES WITH CONVENTIONAL FROCES HAS BEEN DIMINISHED BY CHANGE IN ATMOSPHERE SINCE THEN, BUT THERE IS AN UNREAL QUALITY ABOUT ALGERIAN PUBLIC POSTURE THAT MAKES ME UNWILLING TO ACCEPT VIEWS OF SOME OF MY COLLEAGUES THAT WAR IS COMING INEXORABLY, OR THAT IT IS AT LEAST LIKELY. I AGREE WITH SOVIET AMBASSADOR, WHO SAYS THERE ARE TOO MANY UNKNOWNNS.

3. UNREALITY IS BEST ILLUSTRATED BY LONG COMMUNIQUE ISSUED ON DEC. 26 BY FLN AND POLISARIO FOLLOWING TWO DAYS OF DISCUSSION BETWEEN FLN FUNCTIONARIES AND MEMBERS OF POLISARIO POLITBURO LED BY A MAN IDENIFIED HAHFOUD, SECRETARY OF THE POLITBURO. COMMUNIQUE SPENDS MOST OF ITS TIME TALKING VAGUELY IN PRAISE OF PROGRESSIVE FORCES AND LIBERATION MOVEMENTS OF THIRD WORLD AND THEIR ANIMOSITY TOWARDS IMPERIALISM AND NEO-IMPERIALISM, AND SAYS VERY LITTLE ABOUT SAHARA ITSELF, OR ABOUT WHAT FLN AND POLISARIO ARE GOING TO DO. IT READS AS THOUGH PARTIES HAD BEEN MEETT AT AIRLIE HOUSE TO DISCUSS FUTURE OF HUMAN RACE, WITH A SIDE GLANCE AT SAHARA.

4. MEANTIME, ST. GEORGE HOTEL HAS BEEN REQUISITIONED IN PART FOR POLISARIO AND SAHRAOUI DELEGATIONS AND POLISARIO MEMBERS ARE MOBILIZED FOR VARIOUS MEETINGS, SUCH AS THAT OF THE ARABIZATION COUNCIL, WHICH WAS BRIEFED ON THE SAHARA PROBLEM BY YOUNG POLISARIO MILITANT. THE RELEVANCE OF THIS TO WORK AND PURPOSE OF ARABIZATION COUNCIL WAS NOT EXPLAINED.

5. DAILY PRESS ALSO CARRIES REPORTS OF MEETINGS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, AND OF CONTRIBUTIONS AND MESSAGES OF SUPPORT WHICH ARE POURING IN FROM SCHOOLS /ORGANIZATIONS AND FIRMS. AS FAR AS WE CAN TELL, ALL THESE ACTIVITIES ARE CRIED OUT BY PEOPLE WHO ARE PART OF GOVERNMENT APPARATUS OR IN PUBLIC SECTOR AND THUS SUBJECT TO PARTY OR GOVERNMENTAL DISCIPLINE. MEETINGS ARE OFTEN IN REMOTE AND UNLIKELY PLACES AND THEIR POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE IS LIMITED.

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6. PRESS AND RADIO CONTINUE T GIVE PROMINENCE TO ACTIVITIES OF POLISARIO AND TO SAHARA PROBLEM IN GENERAL, BUT COVERAGE IS LACKING IN FERVOR. VERY BRIEF SPOT ANNOUNCEMENTS ARE MADE ON RADIO THROUGHOUT DAY ABOUT JUST CAUSE OF SAHAROIS AND HOW PEOPLE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO IT, AND EVENING TV NEWS BROADCASTS GO INTO LONG AND BORING DETAIL ABOUT PRONOUNCEMENTS OF POLISARIO ETC. TRYING TO GIVE IMPRESSION THAT THERE IS MUCH FIGHTING GOING ON, BUT WITH NO POSITIVE EVIDENCE TO

BACK IT UP. AS A PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN IT IS PRETTY LACKLUSTER.

7. IF ANY OF THIS IS HAVING MUCH IMPACT ON THE MAN OF THE STREET, IT IS NOT READILY APPARENT. PEOPLE SEEM TO BE GOING ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS VERY MUCH AS USUAL, AT LEAST IN ALGIERS AND ENVIRONS, AND THERE IS NO VISIBLE EVIDENCE THAT ANY ATTEMPT IS BEING MADE TO MOBILIZE PEOPLE FOR WAR AS OPPOSED TO MOBILIZATION IN SUPPORT OF THE REGIME. WE GATHER MILITARY ACTIVITIES MORE APPARENT IN ORAN AREA, AND TENSIONS ACCORDINGLY GREATER, BUT ON NATIONAL SCALE ATMOSPHERE OVERTLY CALM.

8. WHAT IS MISSING IS BOUMEDIENE. HE HAS YET TO COME OUT IN PUBLIC AND CALL ON THE MASSES TO ARISE. HIS PRESTIGE IS VERY MUCH COMMITTED TO THE SAHARA IN PRIVATE, BUT SO FAR THE PUBLIC AGITATION HAS ALL BEEN DONE BY HIS SUBORDINATES.

9. ON OTHER HAND, THERE IS GOOD DEAL OF MILITARY ACTIVITY AND VARIOUS SIGNS OF INCREASED MILITARY ALERT. REPORTED ACTIVITIES INCLUDE:

(A) HEAVY REINFORCEMENT, BY ALGERIAN STANDARDS, OF TINDOUF FRONT.

(B) CREATION OR BUILDING UP OF A MOBILE RESERVE AT SIDI BEL ABBES, PRESUMABLY POSED TO DEFEND OUJDA FRONT OR TO MAKE A COUNTERSTRIKE IF MOROCCANS MOVE IN TINDOUF AREA.

(C) CONTINUATION OF SOVIET MILITARY SUPPLY EFFORT. SEALIFT APPEARS BE COMING IN ONLY THROUGH ORAN AND ANNABA. EGYPTIAN PILOTS IN ALGIERS HARBOR REPORT NO WEAPONS COMING IN THROUGH THAT PORT. WE GATHER AIRLIFT CONTINUING VIA

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ALGIERS AIRPORT, BUT WOULD BE USEFUL HAVE MORE CONFIRMING DETILAS.

(D) STRENGTHENING OF SAM DISPOSITIONS NEAR ALGIERS AIRPORT.

(E) NEW, SWEEPING RESTRICTIONS ON MOVEMENTS OF BOTH DIPLOMATS AND NON-DIPLOMATIC EMBASSY PERSONNEL. HERETOFORE ONLY DIPLOMATS AFFECTED. EMBASSIES WERE SENT CIRCULAR NOTE ON DEC. 24 INFORMING THEM THAT PERMISSION TO TRAVEL IN WEST, SOUTHWEST ND SOUTHERN REGIONS OF COUNTRY TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED. RESTRICTED ZONE SEEMS TO TAKE IN AT LEAST 80 PER CENT OF COUNTRY'S AREA, E.G., I HAVE BEEN REFUSED PERMISSION GO EVEN AS FAR AS BISKRA AND BOUSAADA WITH HOUSEGUESTS.

(L) FRANTIC PROCUREMENT IN EUROPE OF VARIOUS LOGISTI-

CAL ITEMS CONTINUES.

(G) EIGHTEEN AND NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD LYCEE STUDENTS HAVE BEEN INFORMED THAT THEY ARE TO BE CALLED UP SHORTLY.

10. THESE ACTIVITIES NOTWITHSTANDING, ALGERIA DOES NOT LOOK LIKE COUNTRY ON BRINK OF WAR. TENSION IS NOT THERE. FRENCH MILITARY ATTACHE, WHO PERHAPS BEST INFORMED (WITH EXCEPTION OF SOVIET) OF ALL OF THOSE IN ALGIERS, DOUBTS ALGERIANS PLAN DIRECT WAR WITH MOROCCANS AT THIS TIME. HE SAYS THEY HAVE TERRIBLE LOGISTICS PROBLEMS IN TINDOUF AREA AND HAVE NO SPARE PARTS FOR ANYTHING OUTSIDE ALGIERS.

11. COMMENT: ALGERIANS ARE FACED WITH THREE BASIC CHOICES: (A) THEY CAN MAKE BEST OF A BAD THING AND WORK OUT PEACEFUL COMPROMISE. VISITS OF REDA GUEDIRA AND AHMED CHERKAOUI INDICATE THAT THIS IDEA IS AT LEAST ALIVE, BUT POSSIBILITY THAT SOMETHING CAN BE ARRANGED LOOKS PRETTY DIM AT
DOT. POSITIONS OF ALGERIA AND MOROCCO APPEAR IRRECONCILABLE. (B) THEY CAN WAGE UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE USING POLISARIO AS THEIR SURROGATE. THIS CAN BE COMBINED WITH A SUBVERSIVE CAMPAIGN IN MOROCCO. THEIR CAPABILITIES IN BOTH RESPECTS ARE LIMITED, HOWEVER, AND AS OF NOW THEY SEEM TO BE LOSING GUERRILLA FIGHT IN SAHARA. (C) THEY CAN DECIDE ON CONVENTIONAL WARFARE ON LIMITED SCALE. STIMULATION
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OF BORDER INCIDENT WHICH WOULD JUSTIFY R POSTE WOULD NOT BE DIFFICULT. WITH LUCK THEY COULD INFILTRATE SATISFYING DEFEAT ON MOROCCANS, STRAIGHTEN OUT BORDER ONCE AND FOR ALL BRINGING ABOUT HAS

SAN'S DOWNFALL. THERE ARE TOO MANY UNKNOWN IN THIS EQUATION, HOWEVER, AND SUCCESSOR REGIME IN MOROCCO, PARTICULARLY IF MILITARY, LIKELY TO BE AS COVETOUS OF SAHARA AS HASSAN IS.

12. WE CONTINUE TO THINK POSSIBILITY (B) IS MOST LIKELY. IT IS IN FACT WHAT ALGERIANS ARE NOW DOING, AND CAREFUL POLITICAL CAMPAIGN TO BACK IT UP SEEMS TO BE TAKING SHAPE WITH BOUMEDIENE-QADHAFI MEETING AT HASSI MESSAOUD. POSSIBILITY (C) CANNOT BE RULED OUT, BUT IT IS NOT COMING INEXORABLY. IT IS PERHAPS COMING IF ALL ELSE FAILS.

13. WHAT WE MUST KEEP IN MIND IS THAT FOR BOUMEDIEN TO ACCEPT HASSAN'S FAIT ACCOMPLI IS TO ACCEPT SERIOUS DEFEAT, AND HE IS MORALLY COMMITTED TO PROVING THAT HISTORY IS WITH HIM, NOT WITH HASSAN. WE WILL TRY TO DO THIS AS CHEAPLY AS POSSIBLE, BUT IF IT COMES TO HAVING NO ALTERNATIVES MEANS TO PROVE HIS POINT, HE WILL BE STRONGLY TEMPTED TO RESORT

TO ARMS, WHATEVER THE ODDS. .PARKER UNQUOTE ROBINSON

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